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### The Lost Apple Plays: Performing Operation Pedro Pan

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## The Lost Apple Plays: Performing Operation Pedro Pan

### Abstract

From 1960 to 1962, more than 14,000 unaccompanied minors took flight from Cuba to the United States, establishing the largest recorded exodus in the Western Hemisphere. The displaced children and the country they left behind are often metaphorized using a popular Latin American nursery rhyme, "The Lost Apple." Now, more than four decades later, Operation Pedro Pan persists through a revealing body of performance by and about a nation's exiled children. The Lost Apple Plays investigates how memory, identity formation, nationhood, citizenship, and migration have been dramatized through these performances. Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Nilo Cruz, director/actor/playwright Mario Ernesto Sánchez, singers Willy Chirino and Lissette, performance artist Ana Mendieta, sculptor María Brito, prolific dramatist Eduardo Machado, and new playwright Melinda López compose a Cuba that can be neither lost nor recovered for Pedro Pans, but remains an impenetrable illusion like the restless, liminal condition of lifelong exile.

### Keywords

Cuba, theatre, United States, exodus, migration, displaced, The Lost Apple, Operation Pedro Pan, exiled children, memory, identity nationhood, citizenship, Nilo Cruz, Mario Ernesto Sánchez, Melinda López

## The Lost Apple Plays: Performing Operation Pedro Pan

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From 1960 to 1962, more than 14,000 unaccompanied minors took flight from Cuba to the United States, establishing the largest recorded exodus in the Western Hemisphere. Fearing that the revolution would “devour their children,” parents deprived of *patria potestad*—a term approximating ‘custody’ in English while situated curiously between “parent” and “country” in Spanish—chose this desperate alternative to the isolation, indoctrination, and labor assignments that faced the post-revolutionary nation’s youth.<sup>1</sup> Conceived by Father Bryan Walsh, director of the Catholic Welfare Bureau of Miami, Operation Pedro Pan ensured prompt, safe migration and guaranteed lodging conditions for an urgent child exodus that had already begun. After assisting Pedro, the first desperate child who arrived alone from Cuba to search for relatives in the U.S., Father Walsh created the program with funds from President Eisenhower in which the Department of State waived visa requirements for all Cuban children.

The young diaspora of Operation Pedro Pan turned simultaneously from their mothers and from their motherland, flying away like Peter Pan to occupy places in camps and foster homes in various parts of the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Many located relatives or reunited with parents, though sometimes not for months or years. But nearly all of these children believed that their displacement was temporary, that they would return to Cuba, resisting the hybrid identity that would de-

velop into a new hyphenated cultural category, “Cuban-American.”

Separated from their country in a boundless wait for return, the displaced children’s feelings are encapsulated by a popular Latin American nursery rhyme “La Manzana Perdida” ‘The Lost Apple.’ “La Manzana Perdida” serves as a kind of emblem for the exodus, providing the title for one PBS documentary about the Operation as well as for a book by political scientist and Pedro Pan María de los Angeles Torres.<sup>3</sup> The nursery rhyme begins by posing a question that is subsequently answered but never solved:

Señora Santana, ¿por qué llora el niño?  
Por una manzana que se la perdido.  
Yo le daré una, yo le daré dos; una para el niño, y otra para vos.  
Yo no quiero una; yo no quiero dos. Yo quiero la mía, la que se perdió.

Señora Santana, why is the boy crying?  
Because he has lost an apple.  
I will give him one. I will give him two. One for him and another for you.  
I don’t want one; I don’t want two. I want mine, the one that I lost.<sup>4</sup>

This vivid image of a lost, irrecoverable possession stalls both the child and the narrative’s progression as they resist resolution. The quality becomes a trend that persists forty-five years later, characterizing the Operation through a body of performance and dramatic literature by and about a nation’s lost children—exiles still longing for Cuba from the other side of the straits. Irresolution marks characters, dramatic structures, concerts, sculptural installations, and performance art. This paper examines work created by artists about those flights, considering performance as a therapeutic strategy in resolving the displaced child self. Performance artist Ana Mendieta, installation artist María Brito, INTAR artistic director Eduardo Machado, singer-songwriter Willy Chirino, new playwright Melinda López, Teatro Avante founder Mario Ernesto Sánchez, and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Nilo Cruz compose a Cuba that can be neither lost nor recovered for Pedro Pans, but remains an impenetrable illusion like the liminal condition of lifelong exile.

To always remain “other” in both the exile country and the home country, having two “births” and “selves,” expands notions of

a biculturalism that merely straddles nations. The dramatic work produced by Pedro Pans spans a spectrum of strategies, performing across nations, ethnicities, and identities. Beyond the restless liminal condition of lifelong exile experienced by many other immigrants, Pedro Pans express feeling their lives have been forever interrupted, with childhood essence lost. “We became adults very quickly. The child stayed in Cuba,” insists Pedro Pan Lillian Mirabal Mendez (Dorschner). Many struggle to recover not only Cuba, but also childhood, the parents from whom they were separated, and finally the agency of which they were deprived in formulating such a drastic departure. Different from the sort of nostalgia that characterizes most Cuban exiles as congealed in their lost country’s culture—stuck in the “still life of exile” (*Next Year in Cuba* 53)<sup>5</sup> or a “*cultura congelada*” (*By Heart/De Memoria* 112)—the Pedro Pan children remain frozen in a state of migration, forever in flight. The adult community of Pedro Pans struggles to establish and preserve the names of all who fled unaccompanied as part of the Operation, forging an enclave community within a larger exilic space long supplanting *la Nación*.<sup>6</sup>

Plays and performances by Pedro Pans utilize this conflict as a dramatic tension, delineating fragmented, searching, disconnected characters and unresolved narratives. Settings refuse static locales, instead shifting between, or taking place in liminal or labyrinthine spaces defying any circumscribed locus; they are landless, *destrado*, like their wandering inhabitants. It has become common for work by Pedro Pans to produce autobiographical characters who, “unfinished,” attempt to recover lost spaces and time from a vanished adolescence. In Machado’s play *Kissing Fidel*, Oscar, a grown Pedro Pan exile like the playwright himself, insists that though he was very young he remembers Cuba well because “it is the only happiness I have ever known . . . fiction” (41-2).<sup>7</sup> Cruz creates his own “Lost Apple” metaphor in *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* with the poetic entrance of a young Cuban prostitute as she encounters a Pedro Pan visiting the island for the first time since his departure. She shares with him:

My cat Orlando just died. I am miserable and alone in my apartment. Can you believe somebody gave me a canary? Quite frank-

ly, I thought it was bad taste, because how can you replace a cat with a canary. So I opened the window and let the thing fly free. Now I'm resisting going back to my place, cause I know I'll feel lonely without Orlando. (12)

The prostitute's mourning offers Luca an allegory of his own exiled condition. Like a second or third apple, no replacement for the beloved original—no cat for a canary—will do. Delita's decision to keep wandering forges and freezes a space between her lost home and the changed home she avoids.

Playwright Cruz was not a Pedro Pan exile, but came to the U.S. accompanied by his parents on a 1970 freedom flight. Nevertheless, informed by the experiences of three cousins who were Pedro Pan children and others whom he interviewed, his play *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* focuses on two such exiles returning for the first time to Cuba. Cruz describes the children of the exodus as living "in a stage of limbo and uncertainty while waiting for their parents" (Weiss). In a casting note, Cruz calls for actors much younger than the characters they are portraying, a visual metaphor for the exiles' lost years. "My body has stopped recognizing my age." Luca explains to a stranger in Havana, articulating a life frozen in a state of departure (15).

Cruz believes that "there is a difference between an immigrant and an exile." Explaining the distinction in the context of the Pedro Pan children, he insists:

An immigrant can always go back to their country but an exile doesn't have that option. So these kids, even though at one point they thought they would unite with their parents, they would realize later on that they were not able to go back to their country. (qtd. in del Busto and Ramírez 27)

In *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* it is revealed that Mamá Fefa remained separated from her children until they were adults. A grown Luciana recalls the Pedro Pan flight:

Luciana: I can remember Mama's voice the day we left... "Never let go of your brother's hand. Hold on to your ticket. When you

go up the stairs to the airplane, look for my polka-dotted scarf in the crowd and wave goodbye so I know you're safe. Over there you'll be in different surroundings ... Never forget me and your father, and take care of your new shoes." (9)

When they reunite ten years later, Mamá Fefa attempts to make up for lost nurturing time: "Mama makes us stand in front of her. She cooks. She can't stop cooking for us. With each meal she wants to fill the hunger, the absence. We eat and swallow ten years of distance" (46). The children, each with an "aging disorder" that makes them appear ten years younger, had been stalled in a netherworld: "Our mother couldn't leave, and we couldn't come back" (45). Bereft of both parents and *patria*, the siblings clung to each other, becoming lovers in an attempt to cope with their new adult roles, their changing bodies, and their foreign environment.

Like Cruz, López composed her new play "Sonia Flew" as the cousin of Pedro Pan exiles. The title protagonist struggles to come to terms with the fractured child self she left behind in her abrupt solo migration. While *Hortensia* follows two Pedro Pans as they return "home," "Sonia Flew" flashes back to dramatize a Pedro Pan departure, layering it with a domestic portrait from 2001. The contemporary story unfolds first, in Act One, as grown Pedro Pan exile Sonia exposes that she has suppressed in her memory the circumstances leading to her involuntary flight from her home, family, and nation. Act Two reveals a younger Sonia to expose the story of her exile. The play's sharp structural division of place and time suggests that this character has been able to carry on by not citing her Cuban childhood in an exiled existence. Unlike many other representations of Pedro Pans, Sonia resists the past and not the future. López wrote the play after learning the plight of her older cousins who were Pedro Pan exiles, a discovery that inspired her to read historical accounts of the Operation, and, like Cruz, conduct numerous interviews with former Pedro Pan children (Fabiola Santiago).<sup>8</sup>

Sonia demonstrates none of the typical characteristics associated with "exile." The character deliberately rejected her origin culture, settled in a Minneapolis suburb with a husband and children native to the U.S., and considered herself thoroughly assimilated. "You can be fearless, López insists, "but still it costs you something.

That is what I wanted to explore in my play. An accomplished successful, fully Americanized, fully integrated, ambitious, terrific woman who . . . the cost is catching up with her” (qtd. in del Busto and Ramírez 26). Throughout the play, Sonia recollects the past in episodic chunks, piecing herself together in the process.

López’s approach does not simply “retell” the history of the Operation, but draws significant parallels to current U.S. politics, resonating with second-generation exiles and their contemporaries. Sonia never forgave her parents, and it is not until she has children of her own—when her son Zak enlists in the Marines and goes to war—that she revisits the horrible memory of being sent away from home forever. The airplane attacks on 9/11 incite a new panic disorder for Sonia. This new fear of flying is inspired as much by her Pedro Pan flight as it is by current destructive events. The anxiety begins to trigger “flashbacks” in Sonia which allow her (and the audience) to explore the memories of childhood, finally breaking through to confront and resolve her delayed grief.

Playwright/director Sánchez also dramatizes the exodus with subjective imaginings of a single traveler. In fact, Sánchez creates such an intimate interior portrait of his protagonist that he asks us to remember that his play is titled: *Matecumbe: el vuelo de un Pedro Pan* (*Matecumbe: the Flight of a Pedro Pan*). He insists that “the ‘a’ and the ‘un’ ” be emphasized “because it’s very important for audiences to know my play is solely based on my experiences and no one else’s. Not everyone felt the same way” (qtd. in del Busto and Ramírez 5). This marks a very deliberate revision; the play was originally titled *Matecumbe: el vuelo de Pedro Pan* minus the “un” but as audiences have responded, it has been rephrased to reflect Sánchez’s distinct biographical interpretation.

Sánchez travelled unaccompanied from San Antonio de Las Vegas, Cuba in 1961. Eighteen years later, he founded Miami’s *Teatro Avante*, host of the annual International Hispanic Theatre Festival, and in 1994 showcased his own play about the exodus. Teatro Avante’s production opened with a special ceremony commemorating Operation Pedro Pan and honoring Father Walsh who sat in the audience with Elly Chovel (founder of Operation Pedro Pan Inc.) and dozens of other former Pedro Pan children. The performance consisted of a sequence of haunting, often wordless scenes choreo-



graphed by Leandro Soto and directed by Sánchez himself. Beatriz Rizk describes the production as “una radiografía del pasaje físico y espiritual de un adolescente por los campos destinados a los niños ‘Pedro Pans,’” ‘an x-ray portrait of the physical and spiritual journey of one adolescent in the Pedro Pan camps’ (237). Sánchez’s dramatization spans the time the boy spent as an “orphan,” parentless, in Camp Matecumbe, an outpost in the West Kendall section of Miami to which he and most Operation Pedro Pan boys were sent.

*Matecumbe* opens with an extended airport goodbye as the boy is separated from his mother by militiamen who strip search him and rob articles from his pack. Mother and son gaze between pools of light suggesting the *pecera* (fishbowl), the glass partition that separated children from their parents in Havana’s José Martí International Airport.<sup>9</sup> After surviving many difficult days in the camp, struggling with English and feeling alienated from many domineering co-habitants, he is “rescued” by his mother. Unlike López’s character Sonia who never saw her parents again, *Matecumbe* ends with a poetic reversal of the opening scene: mother and child happily reunite, ending his temporary but protracted orphanhood.

Though Sánchez and other Pedro Pan playwrights script their childhood stories as adults, public stagings of the exodus and its effects have remained a fundamental practice of the exile group from its inception to the present. The events leading to the covert organization of the flights are often narrated in theatrical terms; Torres describes how Monsignor Walsh was the “principal actor” in resettling the Pedro Pans, how the “parents were able to stage such a dramatic exodus,” and the “role” the government took as “struggles were played out through the children” (*The Lost Apple* 4). From the children’s first arrival at the camps, nighttime variety shows served as a way for nostalgic Pedro Pans to stage devotion to their pasts, reciting poems or performing music from their lost homeland.<sup>10</sup> Today, some adult Pedro Pans have reassembled to form a national charitable organization, Operation Pedro Pan, Incorporated. On OPP’s official website, [www.pedropan.org](http://www.pedropan.org), childlike animated images of Pedro Pan singers Carlos Olivo, Marisela Verena, Willy Chirino, and Lissette Álvarez “perform” songs dedicated to the exodus at the click of a button.

Over the last three decades, husband and wife Pedro Pan exiles

and recording artists Chirino and Álvarez have performed concerts dedicated to reclaiming their lost country. Chirino's interrupted childhood fuels his compositions: "It was a huge impact to leave my friends, my family, my history behind, but it was never traumatic because I thought of it [exile] as a passing issue." Still in exile, Chirino clings to the hope that his time away from home will soon pass. With songs like "Nuestro día ya viene llegando" 'Our Day is Coming' and "Cubanismo," Chirino performs "the emotions of a Cuban who was unable to see his country, but still, with faith in human justice, expects to reclaim' (Chirino). Live performances enliven nostalgic Miami audiences with rallying spoken interludes, and quoting the past through projected images—including footage of the Pedro Pan flights—situating these events in an imagined, collective space between the enclave community and the "homeland" Cuban exiles "lack," "usurped and distant from free souls" (Chirino). In this liminal space where vivid documents perform, Chirino, Álvarez, and audiences cope with their own (or vicariously experience others') exile through a ritualistic sensation similar to what Victor Turner terms "spontaneous communitas," or a transient spirit of togetherness (47).

A unique brand of Cuban exile, the young travelers of Operation Pedro Pan were stalled in two forced transitions. First, newly situated between Cuba and the U.S., they remained anxious and frozen in a threshold stage, waiting to return home or waiting for their parents to arrive. Secondly, these child exiles—many of whom were already poised between youth and adulthood—accelerated their own maturity, transforming at once into independent guardians in order to manage their displacement. Pedro Pan exiles divide further the "1.5 generation" of Cuban-Americans defined by Gustavo Pérez Firmat. While child exiles remain atavisms of their Cuban parents, Pérez Firmat insists that the process of acculturation forces them to collect "Americaness" into a significant developmental stage, re-marking the transition made from child to adult. Stressing the bicultural quality of 1.5ers, Pérez Firmat sees the hyphen in "Cuban-American" as a seesaw enabling the freedom to choose between national identities—such exiles who seem to teeter precariously without equilibrium are "equil-libre," equally free to identify with former (Cuban youth) and acquired (U.S. adulthood) designa-

tions (*Life on the Hyphen* 7). The disrupted lives of the Pedro Pans establish the abrupt departure from Cuba as a lurch that becomes the fulcrum in a fantastic biculturation. Performances remember a childhood in order to assemble (or re-member) it, recovering what has been lost through dramatizations of a recollected Cuba.

In one such performance, a mound of mud called “Isla” floats neither here nor there—an organic shape evoking a human form, and, simultaneously, a miniature Cuba. “Isla” is one of Mendieta’s signature “siluetas,” contours made by carving or sinking her imprint into sand or mud. In 1981, she described her “Silueta” series as a method of:

carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body based on my own silhouette. I believe this has been a direct result of my having been torn from my homeland during my adolescence. The making of my silueta in nature keeps the transition between my homeland and my new home.... (*Ana Mendieta* 1987)

Other performances by Mendieta incorporate fragments sampled from *Santería* rituals, further revising an already syncretic religion, adapting a mix of rituals to express deterritorialization or being “uprooted” from Cuba.

Mendieta was 13 when she left Havana with her sister on a 1961 Pedro Pan flight. After five years on their own, the girls’ mother was granted an exit visa. On the day that their mother arrived it was a record low for Iowa’s winter: “27 below zero. I didn’t feel it. I was so happy to get together with my daughters after five years” (*Fuego de Tierra*). However, the reunion was still an awkward one. Mendieta harbored resentment toward her parents, feeling that the circumstances of her migration qualified as an act of abandonment (Olga Viso 78). Such sentiments surrounding reunions and separations are common for Pedro Pans; similar notions are dramatized by Cruz in *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams*—“He brings me Mamá as a present, like a doll from my childhood” (46)—and López in “Sonia Flew” —“I do not forgive you. I will never forgive you. You have broken my heart” (López 109).<sup>11</sup> Mendieta was reunited with her father thirteen years later.<sup>12</sup> His arrival in Iowa initiated a new cycle of

distress for Mendieta, who had reached adulthood in exile, and the artist visited Cuba in hopes of resolving it. In 1980 she attempted to make the country of her childhood home again—not by living there, but by carving the “Rupestrian Sculptures” inside caves on the outskirts of Havana. She named these carvings after various Taíno goddesses, chiseling a matrilineal path back to autochthonous origins, uniting the parentage of Motherland and Mother Earth, with one sculpture titled “Old Mother Blood” (Viso 274).

Existing theories of exile become complicated when considering cases of the Pedro Pan children. In *Cuban-American Literature of Exile* Isabel Borland points out that a Spanish word for exile, *desterrado*, is much stronger, cooperating with Mendieta’s and other Pedro Pan children’s sensations that they have been “unearthed,” “uprooted” (18). Edward Said writes that the exile experiences “simultaneous dimensions” where habits, activities, expressions in the new environment “occur against the memory of these things in the old environment” (*Reflections on Exile* 186). This layers not only the past and the present, but the present with an alternate possible present. Józef Wittlin extends the idea of being exiled from place to incorporate an idea of being exiled also from time:

In Spanish, there exists a word for describing an exile, the word *destierro*, a man deprived of his land. I take the liberty to forge one more definition, *destiempo*, a man who has been deprived of his time. That means deprived of the time which now passes in his country. The time of his exile is different. Or rather, the exile lives in two different times simultaneously, in the present and in the past.” (qtd. in Sophia McClennen 58-59)

Wittlin’s concept can be grouped with Said’s simultaneous or *contrapuntal* phenomenon, where new and old environments are said to occur in the mind and memory of the exile “contrapuntally” as when two independent melodies occur together in music (*Reflections* 186). Other approximations of sensations shared across physical and temporal displacements, such as Thomas Tweed’s term “translocative,” denoting an exile situated symbolically between homeland and new land—attempt to capture this overlay but fail in elevating location over time.<sup>13</sup> *Destierro* and *destiempo* become

especially crucial in examining dramatic works in which both the physical and temporal play various roles in production and reception. The Pedro Pans in *Hortensia* have an “aging disorder” so that we can see their subtracted youth; Sonia develops a panic disorder that visibly disrupts her present with physical symptoms based on sentiments about the past.

Such analogies drawn between exile and mental or physical illness are common. María Cristina García observes in her sociological study *Havana USA* that the line separating nostalgic obsession and madness can seem thin (24). Pérez Firmat describes *destierros* as the “walking wounded” (qtd. in Bridget Booher); Michael Mason declares that many exiles suffer from a “malady called el gorrión” whose “symptoms” involve yearning for Cuba and intense nostalgia for what has been left behind on the island (48). In performance, illnesses pass between the mind and the flesh because they must be dramatized in a way that exile is made “visible” for an audience.

Said’s impressions of the exile as an occupant of a “median state,” continually overlaying past and present, never being “totally cut off” or achieving a “surgically clean separation” (“Intellectual Exile” 370) from one’s homeland. Close examination of the performances will suggest that though the Pedro Pan exile—like other exiles—is not surgically removed, the “Operation” has crippled him. Said concretizes emotional qualities using the body in a way that suggests that exile may manifest psychophysiologically:

The intellectual as exile tends to be happy with the idea of unhappiness, so that dissatisfaction bordering on dyspepsia, a kind of curmudgeonly disagreeableness, can become not only a style of thought, but also a new, if temporary, habitation. (“Intellectual Exile” 373)

The liminality of exile becomes not only a permanent, surrogate *tier-ra* of its own, but manifests corporeally, through detectable symptoms. Machado’s characters also seem afflicted, possessing varieties of neuroses that come to invade the body. An obsessive addiction to *café* is explored in several plays, especially *Kissing Fidel*, where Oscar also screams and spits and flogs himself, vividly recalling the hallucinations that have haunted him from childhood.<sup>14</sup> These char-

acters' neurotic tendencies dramatize a kind of "schizophrenia of exile," the phrase Maida Watson invented to diagnose the bifurcated self established by some *destierros* (189).

Mason's conclusion is that some exiles attempt to deal with problems that have no solution by continually "staging" solutions, acting them out, through rituals, and sacrifices, and props.<sup>15</sup> The repetition of qualities, ideas, scenarios, and character names characteristic in work by Pedro Pans (especially Machado's and Mendieta's oeuvres) demonstrates Borland's theories arguing that Cuban-American literature of exile travels from "Person to Persona," meaning that persons—or writers—translate themselves into personas—or characters—through the reflective distance achieved by their creative process (Preface x). Like Oscar in *Kissing Fidel*, Machado was sent to the U.S. from Cuba via Operation Pedro Pan at the age of 8. He was received immediately by relatives, so he did not go into an orphanage like most Peter Pan children. This unique bit of biography reveals itself in *Kissing Fidel*:

MIRIAM. You were not Peter Pan!

OSCAR. Yes I was. That was the visa they sent me on.

MIRIAM. But I was here waiting for you. You did not go to an orphanage.

OSCAR. You were worse than an orphanage.

(39)

Machado's memories of Cuba, with the tensions he has observed in his own exiled family (whose names he recycles in many plays as character names) provide material for nearly all of his dramatic work.

Like Sonia in "Sonia Flew," Oscar has unresolved feelings about his past. The play takes place in a Cuban funeral parlor in Miami thirty-three years after his migration. The family's matriarch, Oscar's grandmother, has just died when he arrives with the shocking announcement that he is going back to Cuba to kiss and forgive Fidel. Chaos ensues, and hundreds of cups of Cuban coffee are drunk from jittery hands, continually dispensed from two large urns center stage. Cuba shifts from an actual setting to a virtual memory—as

it has shifted in the minds of the exiles the characters represent. Though they can no longer feel at home in the country for which they are longing, the memory of home keeps them going. What is real and what is imagined is of no consequence—the fantasy of Cuba has become real for coloring every aspect of their lives.

Pedro Pan artists often try to “work things out,” attempting catharsis through autobiographical stagings of exile. Critical responses suggest that such works can never achieve that catharsis. For example, Donald Kuspit suggests that the unresolved nature of Mendieta’s work creates an “anti-catharsis” instead of the resolution it so desperately seeks (48). Said suggests that exiles—often becoming writers or other artists—compensate for loss by “creating a new world to rule,” one that is “fiction” (*Reflections* 181). In *Staging Place*, Una Chaudhuri suggests that performance offers a way to “occupy spaces without inhabiting them” (57). Adding to the long list of exile pathologies, Chaudhuri argues that performance can “ease symptoms” of what she calls “geopathic disorders, the suffering caused by one’s location” (57-58). Pedro Pan plays can behave in such ways, as simulations, stagings of lost *tierra y tiempo*, scenarios given un *escenario* (a stage), a medium to recover what is irrecoverable, to resolve the unresolved. Resulting dramatic structures, characters, settings usually remain fragmented, incomplete. While it is characteristic of exiles to search for “roots”—“Exiles are cut off from their roots” Said explains, and “feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives” (*Reflections* 177)—the unaccompanied children were cut from the beginning at “their” beginning. The performances emphasize more than one origin, as the exiles were uprooted from their terrain during a germinal stage of growth. The moment at which they are “frozen” offers more future than past, leaving this young immigrant generation—suddenly propelled into adulthood—with the crisis of reconstructing a self that had only begun to be composed.

Such challenges are explored in the installation art created by María Brito, who has remained in Miami after emigrating via Operation Pedro Pan at age thirteen. Her occupiable labyrinth *Merely a Player* invites spectators to enter a fantastic recreation of her former living room in Cuba, navigating through corridors and hallways to explore the rest of the “house.” Portraits of Brito on the walls

are altered to represent both photos of a pre-exile child self and an eternally unknowable Other, a constructed hybrid reality exaggerated by crossing borders. Some portraits suggest childhood faces overlain with adult countenances, images of the person Brito never became, or of the person she was suddenly forced to become. The installation's title is borrowed from Jacques's melancholy monologue in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* to emphasize the passive role children played in this underground migration. The unaccompanied exiles were the subjects, but hardly the agents, of their own destinies. The sentiment that each Pedro Pan was "merely a player" cooperates with a view of 1.5-generation immigrants as "second actors" or deuteragonists, as expressed by Rubén Rumbaut and his son in *The Dispossessed*:

To the parent generation, as the protagonists (from the Greek *protos* and *agonistes*, meaning "first-actors") in the decision to leave, going into exile is a crucial act of self definition and represents a profound loss and a profound commitment.

But to the generation of their children, deuteragonists (from *deuteros* and *agonistes*, "second actors") in this drama, exile carries a different scheme of relevances and represents less a personal loss than a discontinuity with one's origins, less a personal commitment than an inherited circumstance. (340)

In Brito's case, this "inherited circumstance" has a curious extra layer of passivity, since the act of immigrating, fleeing from home and making a new home in the U.S., was carried out solely by the deuteragonist. The act is laced with false agency as the absent first actor continues to act through the second actor. Viewed this way, the Self/Other represented in the altered portraits suggests not only the child-qua-adult that Pedro Pan exiles became all at once, nor just the past self as child/present self as adult, but the child (deuteragonist) and the adult (antagonist). Carol Damian articulates Brito's sharp critique: "she evokes the pain of isolation, the shedding of masks with their pretense to false roles and identities, and the quest for eternal peace. In a small house that is as much a laboratory of self-introspection as a trap that warns of the errors of the past..." (145-46). The memory house, however, is a labyrinth of limited op-



tions. A multitude of doors leads nowhere. The actor, the spectator, and the artist all become stalled by an unlive, irretrievable past.

The lost “house” is an easily *dramatizable* metonym for lost “homeland.” The attachment Pedro Pan exiles have to irrecoverable objects and places recontextualizes Gaston Bachelard’s concepts of “Topoanalysis” and “Motionless Childhood,” in which through memories of the “house” we create “fixations of happiness” (5). Many definitions of exile involve the idea of the house. Lourdes Casal describes exile as the act of dwelling where “there is no house whatever in which we were ever children” (79). Chauduri, in her intense examination of the idea of exile and (failed) homecoming, discusses “the fantasy of home as originary space” (116). Cuban exile poet Octavio Armand observed that exiled people “always carry along their homes” insisting that these internalized houses “live within them, although they are no longer places of physical dwelling” (qtd. in Gener).<sup>16</sup> Plays and performances by Pedro Pans travel back, whether they dramatize a physical return to Cuba (as in *Hortensia*) or a psychic return produced through surrogate space (Mendieta’s *siluetas* in Mexico, Brito’s gallery replications of her house in Cuba). A physical return—where characters actually go to Cuba—is attempted more through plays; in performance art, rather than posing a scene in an imagined reality to be Cuba, “Cuba” is represented by environments unframed by a formal stage, potentially retaining ersatz status, displaying their inferiority to a lost “original.”

A Cuba is “composed” by child-exiles—and re-composed by dramatists—without existing; it is a simulacrum, an idea of Cuba, an idealized Cuba. Because of the island’s radical metamorphosis since Operation Pedro Pan’s final flight in 1962, now even an “accurate” recollection of the times and places of childhood only renders this fantastically valid as the act of assembling replaces remembering.

\*Dedico este artículo a mi madre, mi tía, y mi tío--Marta, María Cristina, y Fernando del Busto—y a los otros 14,045 niños de Operación Pedro Pan. I dedicate this paper to my mother, my aunt, and my uncle--Marta, María Cristina, and Fernando del Busto—and the other 14,045 children of Operation Pedro Pan.

## Notes

1 News that the new government might strip parents of *patria potestad*, or parental authority, became the primary motive for the formation and continuation of Operation Pedro Pan. For more on *patria potestad* and Pedro Pan see de la Campa (37), Pedraza (81), or Conde (16-20).

2 The parallel between Cuba's exodus of unaccompanied children and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* was first noted by the *Miami Herald's* Gene Miller (1962).

3 After David Susskind's *The Lost Apple/La Manzana Perdida* and Torres, *The Lost Apple: Operation Pedro Pan, Cuban Children in the U.S., and the Promise of a Better Future*, the national charitable organization Operation Pedro Pan, Inc. was recognized by The National Archives in Washington D.C. with a ceremony titled "Operation Pedro Pan and The Lost Apple" (2005).

4 The lyrics of this popular lullaby vary slightly across multiple sources, including Torres's *The Lost Apple* and Coro Corolillo's *Cuban Lullaby* recording (2000). This version was translated by Marta Elena del Busto.

5 The concept and the Pérez Firmat book's title *Next Year in Cuba* evoke the popular Cuban-American toast "El año [que] viene estamos en Cuba," still putting lives on hold. Torres characters in López's "Sonia Flew."

6 Cuban exiles forming imagined communities which behave as a replacement nation is discussed in Tweed (85).

7 Machado also uses this quote to introduce his biographical program note for the 2005 INTAR production.

8 In the April 2008 Dos Alas Theatre event *The Lost Apple Plays*, López explains that she did not learn of the exodus until she was already a playwright, and was motivated to begin collecting her family's stories in the form of a creative research project.

9 The *pecera* is described at length in Conde (1) and Eire (377).

10 A haunting song of patriotism sung by a young Dulce Maria Sosa is captured in David Susskind's documentary *La Manzana Perdida*. This 1962 footage of young exile belting out a desperate anthem to Cuba while still in the Miami camps is also made available for public view on the official website for Operation Pedro Pan, Inc.

11 This quotation is drawn from López's own unpublished manuscript with the author's permission.

12 Mendieta's father was forced to remain behind because he was detained in a Cuban prison after his conspiratorial involvement with Bay of Pigs.

13 See Tweed, *Our Lady of Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*.

14 Ricardo Ortiz outlines this obsession in a discussion of *Modern Ladies of Guanabacoa* and other Machado plays in "Café, Culpa, and Capital: Nostalgic Addictions of Cuban Exile."

15 While Mason's focus is limited to Cuban exiles performing *Santería*, his theory can be applied to the solutionless problems of exile outlined by Said, Torres, and Pérez Firmat.

16 Armand includes similar statements in his prologue to *The Voice of the Turtle*.

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